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# MEMORIAL

OF THE

## LIFE AND SERVICES

OF

# JESSE PARKER BANCROFT, M. D.

FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS THE SUPERINTENDENT  
OF THE NEW HAMPSHIRE ASYLUM  
FOR THE INSANE,

1857-1881.

*MEMOR SEMPER ET FIDELIS.*

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## DR. JESSE P. BANCROFT.

REPRINTED FROM FORTY-NINTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES.

On the thirtieth day of April, 1891, Dr. Jesse P. Bancroft, who had been long and intimately connected with the asylum, passed peacefully from this to another life, at the mature age of seventy-six years. Between the two earliest hours of the morning, the angel with the inverted torch summoned him, in his chamber, to the higher duties of a higher life.

Dr. Bancroft was of good old English stock, and was born at Gardiner, Mass., on the seventeenth day of June, 1815. He was fitted for college at Andover, Mass., and graduated at Dartmouth in 1841. Choosing the profession of medicine, he afterwards pursued his studies with the late Professor Peaslee, then a resident of Hanover, and graduated at the Dartmouth Medical School in 1844. He had previously devoted some time to teaching, and was, for a time, a demonstrator of anatomy in the medical school, at Brunswick, Maine.

In 1845, he commenced the practice of his profession at St. Johnsbury, Vt., where he acquired not only an extensive business, but a reputation for marked ability as a physician, and a high character as a man. Two years after going to St. Johnsbury he was married to Miss Elizabeth Speare, of Hanover, who survives him. Here he resided for twelve years, and until an invitation, tendered him by the Board of Trustees of the New Hampshire Asylum for the Insane to accept the super-

intendency of that institution, induced his removal to Concord.

An interest in psychological science was, perhaps, one strong motive which influenced his removal. He entered upon the discharge of his official duties, as superintendent of this institution, on the fifteenth day of July, 1857, and pursued them continuously, with now and then a limited vacation abroad, until 1882 — a period of twenty-five years. Few American superintendents can be found whose terms of service have been as long. His tenure of the office of treasurer was still longer, beginning in 1857, and ending in 1890. During the forty-nine years of the Asylum's active existence, he has served it as treasurer for no less than thirty-three. The subsequent history of his life is so closely interwoven with that of the Asylum that the two cannot be dis-united.

The care of the insane in New Hampshire may be separated by lines somewhat vague into three distinct periods.

1. That of abuse and cruel neglect, resulting in part from parsimony, in part from ignorance, and in part from fear. This period extends over some two hundred years — from the first settlement of the State to the erection of the asylum, in 1841-42. It reaches, indeed, a little beyond this latter date, inasmuch as many guardians of insane persons did not immediately avail themselves of the humane provisions of the institution. The chain and staple, the county jail, the private cage, and the unwarmed chamber or outhouse, which long use had sanctioned as restraints of persons deemed mad and feared, passed into disuse but slowly.

2. The second period, in which humane confinement, medical aid when needed, and a monotonous diet were the principal remedial agents, extended

through the dawn which separates the black darkness of the first from the cheering light of the third. The treatment of this interval was far in advance of that of the preceding, inasmuch as intelligent care was substituted for ignorant neglect, and uniform kindness for hard indifference.

3. The third period, to continue the illustration, began with the morning and has advanced with the strengthening light of advancing day. Then, for the first time, a more intelligent benevolence aided by applied science, an enlarged understanding of mental disturbance, and better architectural conveniences came to the help of those to whom the welfare of the insane had been intrusted.

It was early in this third period that Dr. Bancroft was called to the superintendency of the New Hampshire Asylum for the Insane. The late Dr. John E. Tyler, his immediate predecessor, who had discharged the duties of the office with marked ability, left it when he entered, and in a highly prosperous condition. The asylum structure had just been enlarged by the erection of the Rumford wing, and of the older portion of the Peaslee building. The patients numbered some one hundred and seventy, and it had accommodations for some fifty or sixty more.

Dr. Bancroft entered upon the discharge of his duties on the fifteenth day of July, 1857. In accordance with a previously existing custom, which has prevailed in this institution almost from its opening, he had been made both superintendent and treasurer. If this usage has been uncommon in institutions of a similar character, it has ever proved satisfactory in New Hampshire, a fact which may be due, in part, to the good fortune of the asylum, in having had superintendents possessed of good business capacity, and in part to the fact that,

under this system, the agent for the expenditure of the asylum's money has also been the agent for its collection and has had, consequently, a constant knowledge of the condition of its treasury. It has also subserved the convenience of parties wishing to make payments at times outside general business hours. Under this system, no conflict of authority is liable to occur, the whole management being intrusted to a single executive officer, responsible only to the trustees.

The new superintendent very soon mastered the general routine of his daily duties, and began to study the broader requirements of the work committed to his execution, and the instrumentalities at his command. He was not slow in discovering that he was to be hampered in his efforts by structural defects in the asylum buildings, and by the limited resources at his command.

One of the first facts to arrest his attention was the imperfection of the warming apparatus. This had been introduced a few years before (1855) when steam heating was in an experimental state. Each of the four wings of the asylum was dependent upon one immense steam coil, some sixty feet long, inclosed in an air chamber in its basement. This was tapped by numerous flues intended to convey heat to the wards above. From this system two evils resulted, and each was a serious one. The warm air ducts proved capricious, some delivering heat to the halls above as they were expected to do, and some abstracting and conveying it back to the air chambers whence it came. It was also found that condensation had occurred before the steam had made the circuit of the coil.

The only sure result, in most instances, was an imperfect warming of the wards and rooms. The problem, therefore, claiming the earliest possible solution was an effectual remedy for this evil—a simple prob-



lem now, but one whose solution had not then been reached. Dr. Bancroft gave to it much attention, and relief was found in the substitution of numerous small coils, placed in separate air chambers of corresponding sizes, for the larger ones, and in assigning to each of these a specific work in proportion to its capacity. This modification of the system, involving much labor and large expense, removed the evil. Since then, the asylum has been satisfactorily warmed. While the sizes and shapes of the coils and air chambers have been repeatedly changed, the great principle underlying the modification has been found to be a sound one.

Dr. Bancroft had not been long in office before another structural defect of the asylum buildings also claimed his attention, as the cause of the imperfect ventilation, which had both perplexed and annoyed him. Upon examination, the exit flues, made for the removal of vitiated air from the halls and rooms, were found to be but four inches square and very roughly plastered. These, inadequate at the beginning, had been rendered almost wholly inoperative by collections of dust and cobwebs.

While the remedy of this evil was patent, it involved the enlargement of every flue in the older wings of the asylum — a work which could be prosecuted but slowly and at much inconvenience to the inmates. But this was imperative, was boldly undertaken, and carried forward for several seasons until fully accomplished. Now, it would be hard to find more perfectly warmed or better ventilated halls than those of the early built wings of this asylum.

All the older parts of the asylum were constructed in accordance with a plan in vogue fifty years ago, which provided for long ranges of rooms in each story, opening upon a long hall common to all, and lighted only at one

or both ends. When the room doors were closed, these halls, which furnished the common sitting-rooms of the patients, were dimly lighted, and depressing in their influence upon the minds of their occupants.

The remodeling of these, in such a manner as would admit in abundance the light of day and the cheering influences sure to accompany it, was still another of the problems which devolved upon the superintendent for solution. Nor did he shrink from it. Ere long, the dull monotony of dreary corridors was made light by the occasional removal of closed rooms, and the construction of bay windows, or the enlargement of windows already existing. Better furniture was introduced and pictures. At the same time, the dining-room furnishings were greatly improved, and the table was made more attractive. In a word, an agreeable domesticity was introduced, and superseded the systematic dullness, which, more than confinement, makes asylum life irksome. It is hard for one who has only known these halls since their renovation, to appreciate the extent and value of the change thus wrought.

No branch of asylum practice has made greater progress during the last fifty years than that of the treatment of violently excited patients. In the original construction of the asylum, two brick arches in the basement of the Kimball wing were set apart for this purpose, and fitted up according to the ideas then prevailing. They were made secure by floors and fronts of plank, but were, in that location, necessarily damp and dismal, the more so in winter, as they were furnished with no means of warming. A person of a sound mind even and sound body could endure unharmed, for a brief period only, a confinement in one of these. To the honor of the asylum, it may be said, that they were tolerated but for a short time, and were soon super-

seded by a brick building containing sixteen rooms wholly above ground, fairly lighted, and warmed when necessary. But even these became unsatisfactory in a few years, as they furnished to their inmates little beside animal comfort and confinement.

This building, however, did service for some eight or ten years, and until a better one, now known as the older part of the Peaslee wing, was secured. The erection of this marks an era in the improved treatment of this class of patients. Its accommodations were far in advance of those of a similar kind afforded by most other asylums in the country. These afforded to patients the utmost possible liberty consistent with their best welfare, enhanced their physical comforts, and made practicable increased attention on the part of their attendants. They also allayed much of the excitement before experienced, and demonstrated the evil of undue restraint. Then, as now, this building adjoined the Chandler wing on the men's side of the house. Two of its wards were assigned to male, and one to female patients.

As the number of the asylum's patients increased, from time to time, the accommodations of this building became inadequate, and the erection of another of similar character, with such modifications as experience had suggested, for the use of women, became imperative.

The design of this building was intrusted mainly to the superintendent. It was to stand upon ground of a lower level than that occupied by the existing buildings, and to have an immediate connection with the west end of the Rumford wing. Up to this time (1867), the stories of all additions to the asylum had been made to correspond with the low stories originally adopted, which had long proved objectionable. Experience with

the strong building before mentioned, had suggested some enlargement of rooms and corridors, higher stories, improved ventilation, and the introduction of a dining-room to each floor.

The embodiment of these and some other points necessitated the erection of an independent building, to be connected with the general structure by a three-story corridor, and the surmounting of discrepancies of floor levels by stair flights.

To the design of such a building Dr. Bancroft devoted much serious study. Preliminary sketches were made, revised, and considered; to be redrawn with modifications again and again, until, at length, they were reduced to the permanent plans in accordance with which the present Kent building was afterwards erected. Some twenty-three years of uninterrupted occupancy have demonstrated the wisdom embodied in its design.

As originally constructed, the asylum kitchen was a low and imperfectly lighted room of insufficient size, on the front side and in the basement of the administration building. It was reached from the main hall by a stairway, near the front door. The chapel occupied a portion of the attic of the same building. Its dimensions were contracted, it was lighted by a single window, and its accessibility was difficult. The introduction of radiators had well nigh spoiled the basement as a repository of food supplies. In short, in 1868, the institution with two hundred and thirty-five patients in its halls was found to be without a proper chapel, dining-room for its employés, kitchen, and cellar.

It was evident that room for these could not be found within the then existing buildings of the institution. For the design and location of the commodious building

which now accommodates them all, the asylum is also mainly indebted to the superintendent.

The proposition is a self-evident one, that an institution for the insane requires an abundant supply of pure water. This fact has never been forgotten by the trustees of the asylum. As early as 1843, the next year after its opening, the superintendent reports to the trustees a daily supply of about twenty-five barrels from a "defective aqueduct," besides such additional amount as might be needed from a well. This, of course, was very soon found inadequate, and a dam was constructed across Bow brook, in the rear of and in close proximity to the asylum. The asylum pond of some half a dozen acres was the result. Somewhat later a spring was opened near by which supplied the drinking and cooking water of the institution. These superseded the aqueduct and well, and upon these the asylum depended for its water until 1880.

As the family increased in numbers this spring became unable to meet the enlarged demands upon it, and the question of a larger supply of potable water was earnestly discussed. Dr. Bancroft finally concluded to sink a well in close proximity to it, into which should be collected its water and that of all other springs centering at that point; its supply to be supplemented, if necessary, by filtered water from the pond.

In accordance with this decision, a well fifteen feet in depth and fifty feet in diameter was sunk through various strata of sand, clay, and gravel. This was walled up with heavy split stone, and covered with a permanent circular building of brick walls and a slated roof.

The supply of water thus obtained has proved abundant. Upon this well is made a daily draft of about seventy thousand gallons. Except when thus tempora-

rily reduced, its water maintains a uniform depth of about nine feet, at which point it stands in equilibrium with its sources of supply. Neither drought nor rainfall effect its level. Upon this well many parts of the institution depend entirely for their water.

For many years demands had been made upon the asylum for the special care of individual patients which it was unprepared to meet. As a consequence, such either remained at home or were sent to institutions without the State. It was with regret that the superintendent was obliged to say to the friends of such that the institution was not organized to afford the treatment sought.

He painfully revolved this fact in his mind for years. He repeatedly called to it the attention of the trustees. The desirableness of such a building as would meet this want was freely acknowledged, but the lack of about thirty-five thousand dollars stood in the way of its erection. At length, however, the earnest desire of the superintendent, and their own convictions of duty constrained the trustees, in the absence of any hope of an appropriation by the Legislature, to ask of that honorable body the privilege of borrowing, for this purpose, on the asylum's credit, the sum of twenty thousand dollars. This request was granted, and the erection of the building was at once commenced. This sum proving insufficient, was subsequently increased by a state appropriation of ten thousand dollars, and a farther one by the trustees from the income of the permanent funds. These sufficed for its completion. In consideration of the devoted earnestness with which Dr. Bancroft had sought its erection, and of the many ideas largely original and peculiarly his own which he had embodied in it, the trustees attached to it his name, and called it the Bancroft building.

At the time of its erection this building had few if any equals, and no superiors on this line of asylum work. It permits a flexibility of treatment which is impossible in an ordinary asylum ward. It surrounds its inmates with all the attractions of home. Pleasant and well furnished apartments, special attendance, the least possible interference with personal liberty, seclusion or society as may be deemed most desirable, are all made active in promoting their welfare.

But Dr. Bancroft did not confine his activity to the indoor work of the asylum. He had also under his control its grounds and farm, which embrace an area of nearly two hundred acres. He frequently sought recreation in studying the capabilities of these to afford adjuncts to the remedial agencies of the house. He possessed a natural love for landscape gardening and for farming. The high success of the efforts made for the improvement of the land belonging to the institution is due in no small measure to his good taste and skill.

Thus far, little has been said of Dr. Bancroft's strictly professional work, of his knowledge of mental disease in all its various phases, or of his skill in efforts for its removal. The annual reports of the institution afford the best record of these. The gradual enlargement and conversion of the old asylum buildings, embarrassingly faulty with the errors of their age, into the commodious edifice of to-day, attest not only a clear knowledge of structural wants, but a marked ability to meet them.

It is easy for any one who has been long conversant with Dr. Bancroft and his work, to read in these very important changes and additions his own gradual advance in the learning and requirements of his specialty. In these he has written an autobiography covering the best years of his life.

But absorbed as was Dr. Bancroft in his professional

work, he, like most busy men, occasionally found time for other employment. He identified himself with the interests of the city of his adoption. For nine years he rendered valuable service as a member of its Board of Education. For eight years he occupied the responsible position of a member of the standing committee of the trustees of the New Hampshire Savings Bank. For twenty-four years he was a trustee of the Rolfe and Rumford Asylum. He was, from time to time, called to testify, as an expert, in cases where mental soundness was in question. For three years he was a lecturer on mental disease in the Dartmouth Medical School, at Hanover. He was a member of the New Hampshire Medical Society, of the National Association of Medical Superintendents of Asylums; and at the time of the first attack of the malady which caused his death, he was, as President, addressing the members of the New England Psychological Society then in session at Boston. The papers which he has read at meetings of his professional brethren have been valuable. Some of these have been published and their circulation has contributed to his reputation as an alienist both in this country and in Europe.

Dr. Bancroft kept himself well informed of the progress of current events, and was always in hearty sympathy with all such as tended to ameliorate the condition of his fellow men. While he was never a politician, and never, during his residence in New Hampshire, held a political office, or was influenced in the selection of an asylum employé by the political views of the applicant, he held decided opinions upon the administrative policies of our state and general governments. While he never obtruded these upon any one, he never sought to conceal them.

A similar remark applies to his religious convictions,



which were well defined and positive. While in arriving at these, he was largely self reliant, and “Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri,” he entertained the highest respect for those of others, unaccordant with his own. He based his views upon those of no particular time, school, or church. They grew, rather, from a careful consideration of the great fundamental principles enunciated in the Holy Scriptures. He was for many years a member of the Congregational church and died in its communion.

Every good and generous work had his sympathy, and, as far as practicable, his support. He labored long and earnestly that the pauper insane of New Hampshire might become the wards of the State. Few things ever gratified him more than the enactment by the Legislature of the law which made them such.

Dr. Bancroft was a diligent man, and, without seeming such, was always a student, not of books merely and in his study, but every where he went as well. On his daily rounds among his patients, on the asylum farm, in the meetings of the trustees, and in those of his medical associates, as also in his successive journeyings abroad, he was constantly gathering important facts, to be subsequently pondered and, so far as might be, reduced to generalizations.

As one reviews the life of Dr. Bancroft, it is by no means difficult to see what made him the man he was.

1. He came of good old New England stock. His character was largely determined by his ancestors, generations before he was born.

2. He had in early life the advantages of a good education, which he diligently supplemented by subsequent study, experience, and reflection. From these came, in part, the ability which he brought into use in his daily work.

3. He was by nature a broad man and progressive. His mind was ever open to the reception of new ideas, which, having carefully revolved, he accepted or rejected as his reason dictated. He was little swayed by prejudice, but was candid in the examination of any subject. He always sought truth and was ever loyal to it when he had found it.

4. His moral tone was elevated. He was a conscientious man. Long association with him has proved that he was an honest one. He was not swayed by policy. "He would not flatter Neptune for his trident, nor Jove for his power to thunder."

5. He was a fine-grained man, of acute sensibilities, and often able to discern in others obscure qualities which might escape the observation of a person less delicately organized. This characteristic was of great value to him in his professional work.

6. He was, too, a gentleman in every fibre of his composition, and a gentleman of lofty type. He was not the mere product of artificial culture. While he may have owed much to the attrition of society, and to extensive mingling with equals and superiors, the most attractive qualities of his character were inborn. Affability and delicacy, integrity, patience, and sweetness were so interwoven with every feature of his mental composition that they became parts of it.

7. But ever accompanying all these, and of inestimable value in guiding them, was a broad and intelligent common sense. This he possessed in large measure, and it was mainly the gift of God. To this is to be largely attributed that mental equipoise which he was never without, and which enabled him to weigh, as in a balance, different points in the consideration of a subject, and reach conclusions which time and experience were most likely to sustain as true ones.

Dr. Bancroft served well his day and generation. The record of his life is an inspiration for good and pervades the longest chapter in the history of the asylum. New Hampshire owes him a debt of gratitude for his devoted ministrations to the welfare of her insane. The State is the better for his having lived in it.

The day of his obsequies was a beautiful one. The fresh grass, the half expanded leaves of the trees, and the returning birds proclaimed an early spring. The renaissance of nature was quietly declaring the great fact of human immortality.

A score or two of friends stood with bowed heads around his casket as it rested temporarily upon one of the highest elevations of the cemetery. Just below, the broad Merrimack swept quietly by on its journey from the mountains to the sea. A midday silence rested like a benediction upon all around, and a peace, like unto the peace of God which passeth all understanding, softened the sorrow of aching hearts. As careful hands lowered to its resting place his insensible dust, the bright sun, moving in majesty above, lighted the portal of his future, and reminded all that Jesse Parker Bancroft had risen to the scenes and employments of a higher life.







THE OLD BURBEEN HOUSE,  
WOBURN, MASS.



